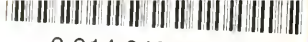


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SPEECH

OF THE

HON. JOSIAH QUINCY,

DELIVERED IN FEBRUARY, 1858,

Before the Committee of the Massachusetts Legislature,

TO WHOM WAS REFERRED THE PETITION OF THE NEW-ENGLAND HISTORIC-
GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY FOR A CHANGE OF THEIR CORPORATE NAME,
AND THE REMONSTRANCE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL
SOCIETY.

GENTLEMEN, — I regret the necessity which compels me to appear on this occasion. I have arrived at a period of life at which it is becoming and wise to abstain from mingling in the controversies of the day, for which I have as little inclination as comparative power. But a Society of which I am the oldest member has seen fit, without any thought or wish of mine, to call upon me for this service; and, after reflection, I have not found sufficient cause to justify me in declining. Having been admitted into it in the year 1797, and been acquainted with all the original founders of it, the opinion seems to have been entertained, that my services might be useful on this occasion.

At first view, to a thoughtless mind, and one not acquainted with the circumstances which influence the character, power, and convenience of individuals and societies, the point in controversy might appear strange and somewhat ludicrous. Two Societies, of respectable standing, are in contest about a *name*; the one striving to get, the other striving to retain a name it has exclusively possessed more than *sixty-four* years without interference. But names are things, — sometimes, in their application to human character, very serious things, — and, in respect of societies, may, by identity with some other, affect both their interest and convenience.

The Society I represent has been, as I have said, known to the world, upwards of sixty-four years, by the name of the Massachusetts Historical Society. No other association of men ever thought of assuming it until about twelve years ago, when the Society now petitioning for the same name was formed, with a name approximating, but not identical with, that of the Society I now represent. It called itself *The New-England Historic-Genealogical Society*, — a name long enough, one would suppose, to satisfy the taste or the appetite of any human being, or of any association of human beings, were they Spaniards or Frenchmen. After enjoying this name for twelve years without question or molestation, they suddenly find it is not long enough; and come to the Legislature of Massachusetts, almost with tears in their eyes, to lengthen it out by adding AL to historic, so that they may be hereafter known as *The New-England Historical Genealogical Society*. Was ever a legislature called upon before to legislate upon a subject so small and so trivial? Nothing is wanted by these petitioners to make them perfectly happy and great, but the *additional* to their already sesquipedalian name. In other words, all they want is precisely the addition of that single element which now distinguishes that Society from ours. Unless there is some hidden hope or anticipated advantage concealed under this desired addition, the desire can have no other origin than idiosyn-

crazy, like that of the frog, who thought that, by a little swelling, he would grow into, or be mistaken for, something very great. But, to treat the subject seriously, gentlemen, can it be for the interest of either of these Societies, or for the advantage of the public, that the name by which two important Societies are known should be identical? For, grant the prayer of this petition, and, notwithstanding the supererogatory matter with which their name is loaded, in general and popular opinion there will be two historical societies, bearing the same name, in Massachusetts. Is this for the interest and convenience of the State or its citizens? Will this long-tailing of the word *historic* increase that Society's power, spirit, or usefulness?

It may aid you in deciding this question to possess a short sketch of the proceedings of this Society and its origin, as I have received the accounts from others, and believe in their substantial correctness. The Massachusetts Historical Society was, by its Act of Incorporation, restricted to *sixty* resident members. In the original draught of the Association, before its incorporation, its resident members were restricted to *thirty*; not from any desire of exclusiveness, but as I have heard, if I mistake not, Dr. Belknap, the real founder of the Society, himself say, to compel the Society to choose only men adapted and disposed to become active workers in that field; in order that it should not be tempted to elect members for the sake of bestowing upon them *a feather*, and become puffy and heavy by numbers, without proportionate activity, and power of progress. The number was raised to *sixty* by the Legislature, without, if not contrary to, the wishes of the original associates; at least, so I have always understood. With the number of sixty, the Society labored during more than fifty years, published about thirty volumes, and obtained a character and celebrity which rendered admission into it a subject of desire, especially by those who had congenial historical sympathies. In process of time, men of this class arose in Massachusetts, adapted and disposed to unite

in the same labors, extremely desirous to become members of the Society, but into which they could not enter on account of the restriction contained in the Act of Incorporation. Men of this description gradually multiplied. Some of these, who hoped for admission, were disappointed when vacancies occasionally happened, and which were filled by others. Some of these were said to have had the mortification of being rejected when others were elected. With wishes and feelings of this kind, the Society now petitioning for an addition to its chartered name, naturally, properly, and wisely originated. There was and could be no possible objection to it. Members of the Massachusetts Historical Society hailed it as a co-laborer in the same field: some of them joined it. Nor was there any thought or feeling or question concerning its tendency to any crossing of interests with the Massachusetts Historical Society suggested, until, in addition to New-England Genealogical, they inserted *historic* into their nomenclature of objects. Friendly suggestions are stated to have been made to some of the projectors of the new Society, that this name might lead to some mistake or confusion; but without effect. It was said that no such danger was to be apprehended; that they had not taken the name of *historical*; that the word *historic* was, in their name, associated with *genealogical*, to which it was applicable alone, and not intended to embrace any general historical scope. Though not satisfied with these explanations, the members of the Massachusetts Historical Society were compelled to be silent; for the names were not entirely identical. Apprehension of some inconvenience was, however, entertained, from the proximity of the names in this respect. Accordingly, as is set forth in the memorial of the Massachusetts Historical Society, it can be proved, that the name the new Society already bears has occasioned many inconveniences to both Societies: that they have been confounded with each other, both at the post-office and in the public mind; communications, and contributions of pam-

phlets and of books, have been so addressed from a distance as to leave a doubt for which Society they were intended. Under such circumstances, is it possible that the Legislature of Massachusetts can think it wise or just to increase these inconveniences by making the names of these Societies, in the manner proposed, identical?

It is proper here to ask, Why did not that Society originally assume, and ask the Legislature in their Act of Incorporation for, the same name for which they now petition? Plainly for the reason, —there could be no other, — that the Legislature of that day would have seen the impropriety, and anticipated the inconvenience, of incorporating two Societies with names whose principal elements were identical. The Historical Society would have then, in such case, unquestionably remonstrated, and as unquestionably would have been successful.

The next step indicates very clearly, that there was somewhere, among the members of that Society, a disposition to *assume* the very name for it which they had not received from the Legislature, and for which they did not originally even dare to ask. For, almost immediately after the Act of Incorporation of the new Society had been obtained, one of its original founders, and, if report says true, the principal objector to its present name, published a periodical, which, to every reasonable mind, must, under the circumstances, be regarded as the act of the whole Society, which, instead of taking its corporate name, at once, in the very face of the Act of Incorporation, assumed the name for which they now petition, and called itself “*The New-England Historical Genealogical Register* ;” plainly evidencing, that it was early in the intention of that Society to assume a name which the Legislature had not granted, and for which they did not originally dare to ask. Now, is it possible that the Legislature of Massachusetts will sanction a name thus assumed under such circumstances, not only without, but in defiance of, their authority?

It is now proper to inquire, What are the grave, solid reasons on which these petitioners rest their hopes of success? Fortunately, there can be no doubt on this subject. The Massachusetts Historical Society happily enjoy the advantage which the scriptural patriarch so earnestly desired, "Oh that my enemies had written a book!" The petitioners have written a book, setting forth those reasons in all their power and strength. "1st, *The desired name is in better taste and more euphonious than their corporate title.*" Grant that it is so. What then? Was not taste and euphony as well known and as justly appreciated when their Act of Incorporation was petitioned for and granted as it is at this day? Why did they accept a charter-name which was in bad taste and so cacophonous? The reason has been already explained. They did not dare to ask for that which they now desire, knowing that it would not be granted. Yet that, at the moment they accepted this cacophonous name, and one in such bad taste, they knew and intended, at some propitious time, if possible, to get rid of it, and assume that which the old Society has so long possessed, is apparent from the fact, that they did then immediately, though unauthorized by the Legislature, assume it, and, by this public assumption, have unquestionably contributed to produce that confusion in the public mind concerning the two Societies which has already occasioned so much inconvenience.

"2d, *It corresponds with the title of the periodical issued by the Society.*" Here it will be observed, that this periodical is openly avowed to be the work of the Society; and thus they derive an argument from their own unwarranted assumption. Acknowledging the inconvenience to the public their assumption has occasioned, they make their own wrong the ground of its continuance and of your sanction of it; making their contempt of the legislative act a reason and groundwork of legislative favor. To say the least, there is a boldness in this argument somewhat original, and characteristic of their whole proceedings. The last ground on which they rest their petition is of

the same extraordinary type: — “3d, *It is the name by which their Society is generally designated and known.*” In other words, having taken upon themselves a name which did not belong to them, having persevered in the use of it in open contempt of the name given them by the Legislature, they ask that now, when the inconvenience they have thus produced is felt and acknowledged, it should be publicly sanctioned, and that this inconvenience should be made permanent. Can it be possible that such an argument can receive one moment’s sanction from the Legislature? This little book, or pamphlet, from which these weighty reasons for granting their petitions have been abstracted, has been, I understand, put into the hands of every member of the Legislature, — a sort of log-rolling emissary, intended to do its work out of doors and in the lobbies, where the real grounds of opposition to it cannot reach, and will be unknown. Now, these grounds are, that inconvenience has already been experienced, and more may be hereafter anticipated. This inconvenience was, in fact, anticipated originally, when the new Society inserted *historic* among their names, and was on that account objected to, yet adopted by them notwithstanding this objection, they maintaining that no such inconvenience could occur, because the name was not identical with ours. And yet, with a full knowledge of these apprehensions, they immediately, in a publication under their sanction, drop the incorporated name, and take the particular element which made the names of the two Societies identical, and out of which all the inconveniences complained of have arisen. Can such proceedings deserve or receive the sanction of the Legislature of Massachusetts?

In justice to the petitioning Society, I ought to say, that the object petitioned for is far from being the unanimous wish of the members of it. Many of its members see the subject in the light in which it is viewed and here presented by the Massachusetts Historical Society, and feel the force of the objections to the prayer of their petition.



Finally, gentlemen, is it for the interest or honor of the State, that the names of two Societies, having both important bearings upon the history of the country, should be, in their principal element, so identical as to create inconvenience to them, and confusion in the public mind? Shall not a Society which owes its origin to such names as Jeremy Belknap, George Richards Minot, John Eliot, and James Sullivan, be permitted to enjoy for ever, without obstruction, the name they originally assumed?



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